

A FRIENDLY MESSAGE TO THE AMERICANS

We are familiar with the saying, “Rome was not built in a day”. But, how many of us know that Rome was destroyed in a day? Its demolition was carried out by the Huns without much exertion or sacrifice on their part. Why? It is because the Roman Empire had been crumbling from within for 200 years. The Huns did not destroy Rome. Rome destroyed Rome through neglect of its founding democratic principles. That is what is happening to your America. It is decaying from within. The values and democratic ideals of the Constitution mean nothing to many Americans.

Three decades ago, John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) delivered these words: “Blight has descended, beginning in Washington and seeping into every corner of America in the confusion between what is legal and what is right”. So let us ask whether you are not witnessing the waning days of Rome.

The three centuries between the great age of Marcus Aurelius (121-180) and the sacking of Rome by the barbarians in the 5th century are called the epoch of Rome's decline and fall. But the Romans who lived in those centuries did not know it was falling. To them, the business of the Empire appeared to go on as usual: Petty tyrants paraded as emperors; rich men dressed up in the sensational togas; Roman soldiers went forth to battle barbarians, even though they did it for money than for glory. The Praetorian Guard proceeded to auction off the imperial office to the highest bidder.

Wars and preparation for wars brought economic and social difficulties which no Roman emperor could resolve. The increasing taxation depleted the treasuries of provincial cities and of individual citizens. Higher taxes led to a decline in revenues. As the wars raged, the finances of the Empire collapsed. The silver coins lost 90 % of their silver content. (In fact, they were copper coins gilded with silver). Inflation gripped the money market, and the price of goods soared. As the prestige of Rome declined, the value of Roman citizenship declined too.

This is the history of the fall and decline of the Roman Empire in a nutshell. We narrate history so as to learn from it. Remember the dictum that those who forget the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them. What then you must do?

Remember that a thousand points of light start with each one of you. Get involved in civic activities that build bridges to the other side of towns and across the nation and throughout the world. You may start a chapter of human rights in your town. You may organise a women's association, a troupe of young women and men interested in music, theatre or literature. You may initiate the formation of a library or a literary class. You may become an activist in a union. There is a paucity of leadership. The torch is being passed on to a new generation about whom it can be said:

With us, it is nothing too high!
Give us the moon
We are just the guys that can run it, if we can reach it.

Help these young women and men to help America fulfill its promise. Stop America bashing and avoid bashing Americans belonging to other states and groups. The glory of America lies in its diversity and its strength is in the unity underlying diversity.

How can your young women and men transmit the spirit of dedication and commitment to the rest of the nation? The answer lies in how a person develops a unique centre of meaning. Maybe an electric transformer will help you answer the question. We know that a transformer is an instrument which modifies electrical current and voltage. The transformer shapes the electrical current which flows into it and sends it out to do its job. Likewise, people have transformers inside, which reshape the message which flows into them. These transformers are one's intellectual capacity, emotional development, educational experience, cultural influences, political commitment, spiritual integrity and professional expertise. Your youngsters may act as electric transformers.

Your young women and men would remember the day of high ethical standards when a handshake was good enough to seal a deal and a person's word was his/her bond. They would bear in mind Kennedy's admonition to distinguish between what is merely legal and what is right. The former is smacks of pharisaism and the latter is sincerity. Your youngsters should be optimistic. Get back we-can-do attitude that characterised your country. Your today's problems have been made by incompetent leaders, and can be solved by dedication. You have a better chance of overcoming your problems, howsoever awesome they maybe.

As long as you keep your minds open, your frontier will never close. As long as you remain tough, adaptable, tolerant, creative and optimistic, the problems of your times will never bring you down. As long as you put principles first, the right thing will never be obscured. As long as you take your civic responsibility seriously, the spirit of commitment and dedication will never die. As long as you keep your faith in the working of democracy alive, the spirit of commitment and dedication can still work wonders, provided the torch that history has passed on to your women and men is held aloft firmly by them.

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